

# Another Time Undone

By Clare Gallagher

Home is a word brimming with emotion, expectation and contradiction. It is never just a place, but a profound experience that both shapes us and is shaped by us. Home is somewhere essential to have, if only to give us somewhere we can leave, secure in the knowledge that there is a place to return to. It is often seen as safe, but also as static and dull; it is the place we leave behind in order to do something meaningful. It is elusive, maybe as much a feeling or a relationship as it is a solid structure or a dot on a map.

Home is an idea whose complexity defies the simple fixity of time and place. We talk about making a home, being at home, making yourself at home, or feeling at home, all common phrases that are resonant with meaning and whose presence or absence is felt deeply. The term *nostalgia* reflects some of the emotional affect of this connection. Combined from the Greek words *nostos* (return home) and *algia* (pain, longing), it was coined by a doctor who noted a sickening in Swiss soldiers missing their Alpine homes. Home is one of our most significant sites for making and storing meaning, memory and identity. It is an ideal; of course, ideals can never really be lived up to.

*The Cure* song that lends the exhibition its title expresses the futility of attempting to reconnect with place in another time, and the beautiful bleakness of memory. It speaks of the poignancy of disconnection and asynchrony. We do not return to the places of our past as they were; we return to them altered, by time, by our (mis)remembering, by our own changing selves.

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Donegal itself exists in a kind of liminal space. It is a borderland, not just geographically but culturally and psychologically. It is the North to Southerners, and the South to Northerners. The accent is distinctive, yet hard to place. It is a county with both staggering beauty and difficult history. The artists in this exhibition all grew up in Donegal and were drawn elsewhere, by dreams or circumstances.

Like the curator, I am a Northerner who grew up in the strange, grey time of the euphemistically-named Troubles. For us, Donegal was a place to escape to, a place of freedom and space: another time, outside our own. Away from the elephant in the room, we could forget the gnawing anxiety, the watchfulness, the grindingly familiar head down, mouth shut. Donegal had mystical connotations for Northerners of our generation. Now, I wonder what people here thought of us, descending on them in search of temporary respite.

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Photography is indexical. It records what was noticed as well as what was overlooked. The camera gathers stray details, capturing not just moments but atmospheres, the in-between spaces where nothing much seems to be happening but where meaning accumulates nonetheless. It collapses time and distance, making it an apt tool with which to approach the place we knew in a different time. Its relationship with the real facilitates a closer reading of the concealed significance of details. Revisiting the photograph releases details, often unnoticed and unremarked at the time, allowing us to return to that moment and to encounter it anew.

Conventional understanding of time through photographs is different to our experience of it in daily life. While everyday life marches on, the photograph enforces the idea of time as a sequence of separate instants - decisive moments - like the blink of an eye (*augenblick*). Once wrested from the stream of life by the camera, they are in one sense dead or historic and, in another, stretched out in an ageless frozen state in which they can be held and examined in ways that are impossible in life. The camera offers us realism, rather than reality. Its seductive illusions of objectivity and 'truth' are unmoored by its tendencies towards instability and uncertainty.

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With echoes of Chris Marker's seminal film *La Jetée*, many of the photographs here suggest a stepping out of ordinary time into another, defined less by modernity and more by nature, rock, entropy, growth, petrichor and damp. They hint at temporal dislocations where moments are relived and distorted. The images point at materiality, intimating a tactility beyond the merely visual and inviting us to recall our own insistent relationship with whatever we call home. The work resists easy resolution, instead drawing attention to the ambiguity, fragmentation and resonance that home often provokes.

The work of the artists here takes Donegal as the point of departure and return, both literal and imaginative. Shifting roles between observer, participant and director, and with differing sensibilities, they lightly brush off the easy nostalgia others have towards this land. Each of them uses the lens with a restlessness and curiosity, interrogating and destabilising monolithic notions of home, belonging and distance. Poetic and beguiling, the work offers original perspectives on the intersection of personal history and geographic ambiguity, where home is at once real and unreachable.